



Alexandria Times

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Out of the Attic

The Germans of Alexandria, part two

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Image: 518-520 and 522-524 King St. in the 1960s. (Alexandria Archaeology Museum)

Continuing our look at German immigrants who settled in the 500 block of King Street in the 19th century, we focus on the house next to the one owned by Michael German at 522-524 King St.

Adam Lynn Jr., an early mover and shaker in Alexandria in the beginning of the 19th century, once owned 518-520 King St. Lynn's parents had owned the property and built a bake house on the site before he inherited it.

Lynn was renowned for his craftsmanship in a variety of fields, including clock making, hardware and jewelry. But in 1822, he fell on hard times and had all of his possessions sold at auction.

The house came back into prominence in 1855 when it was purchased by Henry and Isaac Schwarz. Like their neighbors, the Schwarz brothers, who were immigrants from Bavaria, opened a dry goods store. Henry Schwarz was both one of the founding members of Beth El Hebrew Congregation and an officer of the Hebrew Literary Society.

The next decade brought significant turmoil in Alexandria as the Civil War consumed it. Isaac Schwarz served in the Confederate Infantry. At the end of the war, Henry left his brother and moved to Philadelphia.

It took a while, but Isaac eventually assembled a portfolio that Adam Lynn Jr. would have been proud of. In 1883, he bought his own house, 518-520 King St. The next year, he bought the house next door, 522-524, which had been owned by Michael German. In 1887, he bought two more properties on St. Asaph Street. The 1888 tax records list Isaac Schwarz in the top 2 percent of Alexandrians in terms of wealth.

When he died in 1898, Isaac Schwarz willed the 518-520 King St. property to his son Samuel. The 522-524 King St. property was placed in a trust for his three daughters Clara, Edith and Fannie. Later, Edith married Charles Bendheim, and their son Leroy kept it in the family until the 1960s when it was sold to the Alexandria Regional Housing Authority for demolition during urban renewal.





Office of Historic Alexandria City of Alexandria, Virginia

Isaac Schwarz's prominence in post-Civil War Alexandria and Leroy Bendheim's political prominence in the mid-20th century are reminders of the quick acceptance German immigrants of Jewish descent received in Alexandria.

The fact that German immigrants of the Lutheran faith sold property to other German immigrants of the Jewish religion indicates that place of origin instead of religion might have been a bigger source of identity at the time. Immigrant groups that arrived later discovered that kind of acceptance more difficult.

"Out of the Attic" is published each week in the Alexandria Times newspaper. The column began in September 2007 as "Marking Time" and explored Alexandria's history through collection items, historical images and architectural representations. Within the first year, it evolved into "Out of the Attic" and featured historical photographs of Alexandria.

These articles appear with the permission of the Alexandria Times and were authored by staff of the Office of Historic Alexandria.